

## Let Us Not Forget To Pay Tribute To Working Telephone

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MERTZON — Not since the days when the Indians used to cut down the Army's telegraph poles has the shortgrass country experienced such a thorough disruption of communications as in recent weeks. Telephones all over these parts have been on the blink. Direct dialing, semi-indirect attempt dialing, and partial inner-residential dialing have been as unpredictable as a young man's social schedule on a Saturday night.

Until one of these periodic breakdowns occurs, few citizens will admit how important the wire service has been in conquering the Shortgrass Country. The introduction of the windmill and barbed wire are widely heralded as the principals in settling our homeland. Invention of cottonseed meal and the later advent of the screwworm program are given their due importance. Yet, for some reason, the telephone is left off the honor roll of achievements.

Prior to the recent communications trouble here, I was compiling a study of what an integral part the telephone system was playing in our community. The first thing brought out was the large volume of business ranchers were transacting via the wires. Valuable market tips, I found, were being exchanged without the stockmen ever leaving their homes.

A typical rancher-to-rancher call was going like this:

First Party: Hello.

Second Party: Talk a little louder, I can't hear you.

F. P. (shouting): What happened at the sale yesterday?

S. P.: It didn't hail at all over here last night. Talk a little bit louder.

F.P.(screaming): Is this Bill?

S.P. Yes, whatcha want, Joe?

F. P. (yelling): I didn't hear what you said, but if you can meet me over in front of the post office in an hour, tap on your phone three times with your pliers.

Second Party taps on the phone three times and signs off with two dashes.

Rancher-to-buyer calls are also great time savers. During the busy shipping season, both parties depend on the telephone system to save miles of driving. One order buyer said last month that he would often complete three out of every 10 calls to far away ranches. He said that without telephone contact with his customers in the country he would lose three valuable hours a week, and furthermore his gasoline bill would probably start soaring toward the figure that he spent on long distance calls.

With this in mind, it's hard to explain why the telephone company comes under so much criticism. On a year around basis, rural subscribers have contact with all corners of the earth more than 20 percent of the time.

Meanwhile, the telephone company's billing procedures are punctual and precise. Repair clerks will promise to help any customer who reports a dead phone. Still the citizens out here fuss and rage every time their service is interrupted for more than 10 days at a time.

As soon as service is restored out here, my study will be resumed. It looks now as if we should be back in contact with the outside world by mid-July. Then, once again the unsung hero of the dry grasslands can resume its faithful service. That is, unless a severe fog or turbulent ewe knocks it out of order again.